

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6707
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AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
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AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
USNMR SHAPE
USCINCEUR
DIA WASHDC
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USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PGOV, FR
SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE - JULY 1977

SUMMARY: IT IS A CLICHE TO SAY ALMOST EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN FRANCE IS VIEWED IN TERMS OF ITS POTENTIAL EFFECT ON NEXT MARCH'S LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, BUT THE CLICHE STILL HOLDS TRUE. THE MAJORITY SEEMS TO FEEL IT HAS JUST ENOUGH TIME TO RECOUP THAT 3 OR 4 PERCENT IT NEEDS TO WIN, BUT IT IS NOT MAKING BEST USE OF ITS TIME. EVEN A 2 PERCENT RISE IN THE PRESIDENT'S AND PRIME MINISTER'S POPULARITY IN JULY SHOULD GIVE THEM SMALL COMFORT, GIVEN THEIR MDEIOCRE STARTING POINT. IN THE OPPOSITION, THE PS IS BEING DOUBLY CAREFUL NOT TO JEOPARDIZE THE LEFT'S LEAD IN THE POLLS, BUT IT IS NOT GETTING MUCH HELP FROM ITS PCF PARTNERS. ALL PARTIES WILL BE WORKING THROUGHOUT AUGUST TO CHOOSE THEIR CANDIDATES FOR PARLIAMENT IN SEPTEMBER, WHEN THE CAMPAIGN STARTS IN EARNEST. PRIMARIES WILL BE THE RULE OF BOTH SIDES. SEPTEMBER WILL ALSO BE THE MONTH OF BOTH MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION SUMMITS, AT WHICH THE RESPECTIVE SIDES WILL SET THE TONE FOR THE REST OF THE CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY.

1. BARRE - ONE YEAR AFTER.

JULY MARKED ALMOST A YEAR SINCE RAYMOND BARRE TOOK OVER THE GOF AND A CONVENIENT BENCHMARK FOR OBSERVERS TO ASK HOW MUCH TO EXPECT OF HIM IN POLITICAL TERMS BETWEEN NOW AND NEXT MARCH'S LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. CONFIDENTIAL

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ONE CAN SUM UP THE PRIME MINISTER BY SAYING HE REMAINS TRUE TO FORM: HE IS FOR THE MOMENT STICKING DOGGEDLY TO HIS ECONOMIC PLAN, HE IS GRADUALLY STEPPING UP HIS APPEARANCES ON TV AND IN THE PROVINCES, BUT HE HAS AVOIDED TOTAL INVOLVEMENT IN PARTISAN POLITICS. THUS, AFTER SITTING OUT THE MAJORITY "SUMMIT" ON JULY 19 AND BEING TOTALLY IGNORED IN ITS COMMUNIQUE, BARRE'S RIPOSTE WAS TO DESCRIBE HIS ROLE AS THE CONCILIATOR AMONG THE MAJORITY PARTIES AND THE INITIATOR OF A COMMON ACTION PROGRAM FOR THE AUTUMN LEGISLATIVE SESSION. BARRE'S VIEW OF HIS OWN ROLE -- EFFICIENT, METHODICAL AND LOGICAL THOUGH IT MAY BE -- IS POSSIBLY LESS AGGRESSIVE THAN GISCARD WOULD LIKE. INSTEAD OF RALLYING THE NON-GAULLIST MAJORITY FORCES AGAINST JACQUES CHIRAC, BARRE BELIEVES IN A JUDICIOUS, NOT TO SAY CAUTIOUS, ATTITUDE TOWARD THE RPR.

2. THE CHIRAC MACHINE.

JACQUES CHIRAC TURNED THE JULY 19 MEETING INTO A NEAR TOTAL VICTORY -- AT LEAST FOR THE SHORT TERM. AFTER SIX HOURS OF DISCUSSION, THE FOUR PARITICPANTS

(SOISSON FOR THE PR, LECANUET FOR THE CDS, BERTRAND MOTTE FOR THE CNI, AND CHIRAC) AGREED ON A BRIEF COMMUNIQUE WHICH NEITHER MADE ANY MENTION OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S ROLE IN SELECTING MAJORITY CANDIDATES IN THE 490 DISTRICTS NOR CONCEDED THAT PRIMARIES WOULD BE THE

RULE IN THE FIRST ROUND. FURTHERMORE, IT AVOIDED ANY REFERENCE TO A COMMON PROGRAM OF THE MAJORITY. THESE ARE ALL RPR POSITIONS. ONE CAN SPECULATE ON HOW CHIRAC STEAMROLLED, CAJOLED OR OTHERWISE CONVINCED HIS FELLOW NEGOTIATORS: SOISSON HAS ALWAYS FELT SYMPATHETIC TOWARD THE GAULLISTS AND SEES THE RPR AS THE MAJORITY'S MAIN HOPE IN RALLYING ENOUGH MASS PUBLIC SUPPORT TO STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THE LEFT'S PRESENT
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LEAD, AND LECANUET (AS ANTI-GAULLIST AS THEY COME IN THE PAST) SO BADLY WANTS HIS 30 SEATS IN THE ASSEMBLY TO FORM A SEPARATE GROUP THAT HE IS WILLING TO TREAT WITH THE DEVIL.

3. ONE PERSON CHIRAC HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO STEAMROLL YET IS THE PRESIDENT (AND BY IMPLICATION THE PRIME MINISTER), AND INDEED CHIRAC HAS TO BE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT NOT ATTACKING GISCARD PUBLICLY, WHILE HE CONTINUES TO DO EVERYTHING HE CAN TO PRE-EMPT VGE'S ROLE IN THE CAMPAIGN. GISCARD'S ANSWER TO INQUIRING FRENCHMEN ON WHERE HE STANDS WAS CONTAINED IN HIS MUCH PUBLICIZED SPEECH IN CARPENTRAS JULY 8. AS USUAL MORE PHILOSOPHIC THAN CONCRETE, THE PRESIDENT NONETHELESS DID MAKE THREE SPECIFIC ELECTORAL POINTS: THE PRIME MINISTER WILL DETERMINE WITH THE PARTY LEADERS THE MAJORITY'S CANDIDATES, AN ACTION PROGRAM WILL BE PRESENTED TO THE COUNTRY BY NEXT MARCH, AND THE LEFT

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WING OF THE MAJORITY WILL DECISIVE IN THE FINAL TEST. MORE COMBATIVE THAN IN PREVIOUS SPEECHES, GISCARD WAS PRAISED (SINCERELY OR TONGUE-IN-CHEEK?) BY CHIRAC FOR FINALLY SHOWING HIS COLORS. THE FAMOUS GISCARD-CHIRAC FEUD COULD THUS BE CONSIDERED A DRAW, WERE IT NOT FOR THE FACT THAT (A) SOISSON AND LECANUET REALIZE THAT THE MAJORITY'S CHANCES NEXT MARCH WILL DEPEND ON THEIR REACHING AN UNDERSTANDING WITH CHIRAC, AND (B) THE PRESIDENT, BY VIRTUE OF HIS "NON-PARTISAN" OFFICE, IS LIMITED IN THE NUMBER OF CARPENTRAS-TYPE INTERVENTIONS HE CAN MAKE. AT THE SAME TIME, CHIRAC KNOWS THAT THE RPR, WITH ABOUT 22 PERCENT IN CURRENT POLLS, WILL NEED THE COOPERATION OF EVERY OTHER MAJORITY FORMATION TO WIN

THE DAY NEXT MARCH. A CONFIDENTIAL POLL OF MAJORITY VOTERS, COMMISSIONED BY THE RPR, HAS SHOWN THAT A LARGE NUMBER OF SUPPORTERS SEES CHIRAC AS A DIVISIVE FACTOR IN THE MAJORITY. IN THIS LIGHT, EVEN THE MERGER OF OLIVIER STIRN'S MOVEMENT OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATS INTO JEAN-JACQUES SERVAN-SCHREIBER'S RADICAL SOCIALISTS, ONE OF THE MORE INSIGNIFICANT POLITICAL EVENTS OF THE LAST THREE YEARS (THOUGH SPURRED BY VGE HIMSELF AS THE LANCE FOR HIS "DECISIVE" LEFT WING), WILL DESERVE SOME RPR ATTENTION IN THE COMING MONTHS.

4. THE PRESIDENCY: CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES.

DISCUSSION OVER THE ROLE OF THE PRESIDENCY WAS NOT LIMITED TO THE PRESENT TIME FRAME. A NEW ANGLE WAS ADDED TO THE DEBATE OVER GISCARD'S EARLIER STATEMENTS THAT HE WOULD SERVE OUT HIS SEVEN YEAR TERM, REGARDLESS OF WHICH SIDE WON NEXT MARCH. RPR'S ANGER OVER CONFIDENTIAL

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GISCARD'S REFUSAL TO MAKE A CLEAR COMMITMENT (AT LEAST UNTIL CARPENTRAS) IN FAVOR OF THE MAJORITY BETRAYED ITS SUSPICIONS THAT HE WAS ACTUALLY LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR EVENTUALLY GOVERNING WITH THE SOCIALISTS. NOW GISCARD IS FINDING HIS OFFICE UNDER ATTACK BY THE LEFT. ITS COMMON PROGRAM CALLS FOR A STRICTER READING OF ARTICLE 20 OF THE CONSTITUTION, WHICH SPECIFIES THAT THE GOVERNMENT DETERMINES AND CONDUCTS THE POLICY OF THE COUNTRY AND A REVERSAL OF THE 20-YEAR TREND TO CONCENTRATE MORE AND MORE POWER IN THE ELYSEE. SEVERAL SPECIFIC CONSTITUTIONAL REVISIONS ARE FORESEEN, INCLUDING THE ABOLISHMENT OR REDUCTION OF THE PRESIDENT'S ARTICLE 16'S EMERGENCY POWERS AND A FIVE YEAR TERM OF OFFICE (ALSO PROPOSED BY FORMER PRESIDENT POMPIDOU). EVEN ARTICLE 20 IS OPEN TO VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS, THE PCF GOING MUCH FURTHER THAN THE PS BY MAKING THE PRESIDENT LITTLE MORE THAN A FIGUREHEAD. WHILE IT IS VERY UNLIKELY THAT THE LEFT WOULD HAVE THE 3/5 MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT TO PASS SUCH AMENDMENTS (A REFERENDUM WITH SEPARATE ASSEMBLY AND SENATE VOTES IS THE OTHER POSSIBLE ROUTE), THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESENT DEBATE LIES IN THE FACT THAT IT IS BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY. THE POSSIBILITY OF A LEFT VICTORY NEXT MARCH HAS SEEPED INTO THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT EXPERTS ARE NOW ARGUING OVER THE MEANING OF SPECIFIC WORD CHANGES IN THE CONSTITUTION.

5. THE GREAT GAFFE.

THE EVENTS IN JULY GAVE THE MAJORITY SOME GLIMMER OF

HOPE THAT, IF THE LEFT KEEPS IT UP, THE MAJORITY WILL BE ABLE TO OUTSMART THE POLLS. IN FACT, THE MAJORITY HAD ALREADY HALF BURIED THE HATCHET FOR THE LAST TWO OR THREE MONTHS (WITH THE NOTABLE EXCEPTION OF THE DEBATE ON THE EC PARLIAMENT) AND ITS LEADERS WERE UNCHARACTERISTICALLY BULLISH ABOUT THEIR PROSPECTS. IN EARLY
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JULY, THE MAJORITY CANDIDATE AND SON OF FORMER MINISTER PIERRE ABELIN, WON THE SECOND ROUND RUN-OFF IN A LOCAL ELECTION IN CHATELLEREAULT AGAINST THE PS NATIONAL SECRETARY EDITH CRESSON, AFTER THE FIRST ROUND SHOWED THE LEFT, IN COMBINING THE VOTES OF BOTH THE PS AND PCF, IN THE LEAD. ALTHOUGH YOUNG ABELIN RAN A GOOD CAMPAIGN AND GOT OUT THE VOTES, THERE WAS LESS THAN TOTAL DISCIPLINE BY PCF VOTERS IN TRANSFERRING THEIR LOYALTIES TO THE PS CANDIDATES IN THE SECOND ROUND; AND THIS RATHER RARE BREAK IN LEFT SOLIDARITY LED TO RECRIMINATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES. THE LEFT INTERPRETED THE INCIDENT AS AN ABERRATION, THE MAJORITY AS A SIGN OF THE TRUE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO MEMBERS OF THE LEFT COALITION WHICH WERE FINALLY BUBBLING TO THE SURFACE. THE SECOND EVENT WAS THE RAID BY 50 PCF AIRCRAFT WORKERS DURING THE JULY 21 TV EVENING NEWSCAST (PARIS 21349) DEMANDING THEIR PRO-CONCORDE STATEMENT BE READ. CLAIMING THE PCF HAS SYSTEMATICALLY BEEN PREVENTED (OR AT LEAST DISADVANTAGED COMPARED TO OTHER PARTIES) FROM AIRING ITS VIEWS (ESPECIALLY ON CONCORDE) ON THE RADIO/TV STATE MONOPOLY, THE PARTICIPANTS ALSO HOPED TO CLAIM FOR THEMSELVES THE TITLE OF FOREMOST DEFENDERS OF THE CONCORDE. BUT BY RESORTING TO STRONG-ARM-METHODS OF BARGING ON TO THE STAGE AND POSTPONING THE BROADCAST ONE HALF HOUR, THEY TOUCHED OFF A PRESS REACTION WHICH WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF BOTH THE INCIDENT AND, BECAUSE OF THE PCF'S IMMEDIATE ENDORSEMENT, THE PARTY ITSELF. COMING ON TOP OF THE PCF'S MAY PUBLICATION OF THE FUTURE COMMON PROGRAM COSTS, ITS PERSONAL ATTACKS ON MITTERRAND AFTER THE PS NANTES CONGRESS IN JUNE, AND THE POLEMICS OVER DEFENSE AND OTHER COMMON PROGRAM CHAPTERS(SEE BELOW), THIS INCIDENT HAS LED SOME OBSERVERS TO BELIEVE THE PCF
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DOES NOT REALLY WANT TO PARTICIPATE AS A MINORITY PARTNER IN A LEFT GOVERNMENT. THEY FEEL REINFORCED IN THEIR OPINION BY MARCHAIS' SUBSEQUENT BITTER ATTACK ON

MITTERRAND FOR PS INDECISION ON THE FRENCH NUCLEAR
FORCE. THEIR CONCLUSION, HOWEVER, IS

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PROBABLY STRETCHING THE LOGIC TOO FAR. IT IS MORE ACCURATE TO SAY THE PCF IS USING VARIOUS MEANS TO STRENGTHEN ITS ELECTORAL POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE PS WHILE THERE IS STILL TIME TO MANEUVER AND BEFORE IT BECOMES LOCKED INTO A PARTICULAR LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN A LEFT GOVERNMENT AND TO CAST ITSELF AS THE FOREMOST DEFENDER OF THE WORKING CLASS. AS OF NOW THE PS HAS EMBARRASSEDLY TRIED TO PLAY DOWN THE EVENT AND, WHEN PRESSED, DIVERT ATTENTION TO THE ISSUE OF EQUAL TIME ON TV, WHILE THE MAJORITY CONTINUES TO KEEP THE SUBJECT ALIVE AS LONG AS POSSIBLE AND PORTRAYS THE PCF AS A BASICALLY UNRELIABLE AND ERRATIC PARTY.

6. NEGOTIATIONS WITHIN THE LEFT.

THE PS NEVER DID WANT A NEGOTIATION WITH THE PCF AND MRG TO UPDATE THE 1972 COMMON PROGRAM. IT SAW ONLY PROBLEMS IN OPENING THIS PANDORA'S BOX AND DISPLAYING THE LEFT'S DIRTY LINEN IN PUBLIC. IT MUCH PREFERRED THE EARLIER, OFTEN OUTDATED, AMBIGUOUS TEXT, WHICH AT THE SAME TIME DID NOT JEOPARDIZE ITS PRESENT LEAD IN THE POLLS BUT DID GIVE IT NEEDED ROOM FOR MANEUVERING ONCE IN POWER. BUT ITS HAND FORCED BY THE PCF, THE PS DECIDED TO ENGAGE THE DEBATE TO MAKE AS MANY BENEFICIAL TECHNICAL CHANGES AS NECESSARY, AND LIMIT THE EXTENT OF A PUBLIC POLEMIC. ITS EFFORTS HAVE ONLY BEEN PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL. IN THREE MONTHS OF MEETINGS, A NUMBER OF EMBARRASSING AND PARTIALLY DAMAGING ISSUES HAVE OVERFLOWED INTO A GENERAL PUBLIC DEBATE. POLICY TOWARD PRIVATE SCHOOLS, THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES, DEFENSE AND NUCLEAR POLICY ARE SOME EXAMPLES. IN ALL THESE AREAS, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE PCF IS STRIVING FOR SPECIFICITY, ARGUING THAT THE COUNTRY HAS A RIGHT TO KNOW WHAT IT WOULD BE GETTING WITH A LEFTIST GOVERNMENT. BUT A MORE IMPORTANT REASON IS TO LOCK THE PS INTO DEFINITIONS THE PCF CONSIDERS ACCEPTABLE NOW IN ORDER TO KEEP THE PS "HONEST" (NOT TAKEN BY THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC TEMPTATION) ONCE IN POWER. A NUMBER OF SPECIFIC POINTS WERE LEFT PENDING AT THE LAST (JULY 29) MEETING UNTIL THE LEFT SUMMIT IN MID SEPTEMBER. THE MOST IMPORTANT CONCERN THE NUMBER OF NATIONALIZATIONS (THE PS STICKS TO THE PRESENT NINE GROUPS, THE PCF WANTS TO ADD THE AUTO, STEEL AND OIL INDUSTRIES, THE SCOPE OF WORKER PARTICIPATION IN

MANAGEMENT, FORM OF INDEMNIFICATION FOR STOCKHOLDERS OF NATIONALIZED COMPANIES, THE LEVEL OF A WEALTH TAX, MINIMUM WAGE AND FAMILY ALLOWANCES, THE GAP BETWEEN HIGHEST AND LOWEST SALARIES, NUCLEAR DEFENSE (PARIS 21872) AND A SCHEDULE FOR IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON PROGRAM. DESPITE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PARTIES, EVEN THE PCF RECOGNIZED (BY ITS CHIEF REPRESENTATIVE, CHARLES FITERMAN, WHO IS IN THE OPINION OF SOME BEING GROOMED AS MARCHAIS' SUCCESSOR) THAT CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE AND THAT PROSPECTS FOR AN OVERALL COMPROMISE IN SEPTEMBER ARE FAIRLY GOOD.

7. SEPTEMBER PROSPECTS.

GISCARD HAS CANCELLED GOVERNMENT VACATIONS IN AUGUST AND CONTINUES TO HOLD COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETINGS EVERY WEDNESDAY. BUT THE REAL KICKOFF FOR THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN WILL BE SEPTEMBER. THE RENEWAL OF ONE THIRD OF THE SENATE, WHERE THE LEFT SHOULD PICK UP SOME SEATS, WILL BE SCRUTINIZED FOR LESSONS FOR NEXT MARCH. BOTH THE MAJORITY AND THE OPPOSITION WILL BE HOLDING THEIR SUMMIT MEETINGS, THE FORMER THIS TIME WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF RAYMOND BARRE. PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANT, BARRE WILL PUT THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON HIS CONFIDENTIAL

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LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM, WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE QUESTIONS WHICH WILL COUNT THE MOST IN THE CAMPAIGN; UNEMPLOYMENT, INFLATION, AND THE STABILITY OF THE FRANC. WITH 650,000 YOUNG PEOPLE ENTERING THE JOB MARKET IN THE FALL, WITH INFLATION STILL NEAR 10 PERCENT AND WITH THE FOREIGN TRADE BALANCE NOT YET FULLY RESTORED, HE WILL HAVE HIS HANDS FULL. HE AS HINTED HE INTENDS TO OPEN SLIGHTLY THE GOVERNMENT'S FINANCIAL VALVES. BUT WHETHER THIS POSSIBLE MINOR LOOSENING OF HIS AUSTERITY PLAN WILL PAY ANY POLITICAL DIVIDENDS IS MORE QUESTIONABLE. MOST OBSERVERS FEEL IT WILL ONLY LIMIT THE LOSSES WHICH A CONTINUATION OF PRESENT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS WOULD BRING. BUT BARRE STICKS DOGGEDLY TO HIS PLAN AND GIVES EVERY IMPRESSION THAT IT IS THE ONLY HEALTHY ONE POSSIBLE IN THE CONTEXT OF A WORLDWIDE ECONOMIC CRISIS.
HARTMAN

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